DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 379 SP 022 278

AUTHOR Henson, Kenneth T.
TITLE A Philosophical Approach to Educational Change.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adoption (Ideas); Change Agents; *Change Strategies; Educational Administration; *Educational Change; Educational Philosophy; Educational Strategies; Participant Satisfaction; *Participative Decision Making; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

People resist change out of force of habit, out of fear, and out of hopelessness. Contemporary educators must find ways to overcome each and all of these barriers. A definite plan is needed in advance of any major program change. A good plan should always include: (1) a time schedule that capitalizes on events outside the school, using them as psychological levers to encourage change. Once begun, the innovation must move at a moderate, steady pace; (2) total involvement--meaningful and direct involvement by all those who may be only slightly affected by the change; (3) ways to overcome habit and fear, possibly by identifying a particular group of people to introduce and lead the change and letting the community and/or faculty vote on the proposed change; and (4) ways to overcome hopelessness, primarily by giving the psychological and financial support which is always needed to participating members and assuring them that this support will not be withdrawn. By being aware of these resisting forces, the innovator can develop strategies for dealing with each. (JM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED229379

A Philosophical Approach to Educational Change

by

KENNETH T. HENSON

Professor of Curriculum & Instruction

Delta State University

Cleveland, MS 38733

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kenneth T. Henson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP 022 278

All educators deal with change. Whether the ultimate objective is changing teachers, students, or the program itself all changes require changing people. The roles of administrators, supervisors, and teachers are especially difficult because they involve changing the behavior of others. Progress is difficult to assess because it occurs gradually, since most permanent behavioral changes develop slowly.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the role of changing people is the tendency to perceive the task less difficult than it really is. Changing people is easier for those who are aware of the forces which cause people to resist change.

In our universe change is a natural state; unfortunately only poets and authors seem to be aware of this. British poet, John Wilmot expressed man's role in change with two short lines.[1]

> "Since tis nature's law to change,
> Constancy alone is strange."

But, of course, Man <u>is</u> strange. Since the days of the ancient Order of Confu, man has known that the most perfect lifestyle is one which moves in harmony with the forces of the universe. Yet, those who do attempt to live in accordance with nature are challenged by their fellowmen. A neighbor passing by as Thoreau plowed his field, stopped by to warn him of his vegetarian practices. "If you don't eat meat," he warned, "you will soon weaken and eventually perish." Thoreau called his neighbor's attention to the horse pulling the plow. "He," said Thoreau, pointing to his horse, "is stronger than either of us and he is a devout vegetarian."

Our resistance to change seems to have much of its origin in our

schools. The contemporary critics: James Herndon, Hohn Holt, Ivan Illich, Jonathan Kozol, and Charles Silberman have repeatedly warned of the role our schools play in killing the student's natural curiosity and his openmindedness, transforming him into a rigid myopic adult. Mark Twain gave the same warning almost a century earlier with his humorous but serious lines:[2]

> "Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run."

There are those, however, who refuse to accept the philosophies of poets. Fortunately, there have been numerous research studies to determine Man's attitudes toward change. Watson, in 1967, found that there is no human predisposition in favor of the status quo over change. On the contrary, almost everyone prefers excitement to monotony and is eager for some kind of change in his life.[3] This study is reinforced by numerous psychological experiments which have shown that humans cannot exist without change. When all stimuli (sound, light, touch, and odor) are removed, the mind quickly begins to hallucinate, manufacturing its own stimuli. If people cannot stand the absence of change, then why do people continue to resist change?

Why People Resist Change

Habit

In 1975, Alfonso, et al, conducted a massive review of the research dealing with Man's reluctance to change.[4] They found that one of the main reasons people resist change is the force of habit, which makes our work easier. Without habit the secretary could not type,

file, and answer the phone, all at the same time. Anyone who has been "broken in" on a new job knows how much easier the work becomes once he or she is able to put some of the required tasks on automatic pilot, i.e., once habit begins to take over.

While habit does have its advantages, it also has one disadvantage which may outweigh all of its advantages. Habit causes people to develop tunnel vision. The longer we leave habit in control the less able we are to consider alternatives.

Fear

No single force affects the behavior of people more than the feelings on insecurity and inadequacy. Very early in life we learn to fear that which is different; such as darkness or strange places. Like the prehistoric cave dwellers, we feel threatened by any change in our environment. We even have social expressions for reminding others that they shouldn't introduce changes too abruptly, "Don't rock the boat," or "Dont make waves."

Since we live in a world of symbols, we find it necessary to take caution against creating certain symbols which may carry messages that we aren't even aware of. Recently, the publication of such books as Body Language and How to Read a Person Like a Book, have made us even more aware of ways in which we often threaten others, simply by the ways we dress, stand, sit, move, and even how we look at others.

Of course the older we get the more we seem to resist change. The longer we stay on one job the more we resist change. When new

members join our organizations their suggestions for change are often met with the following rebuttals: [5]

"But we have always done it this way."

"We tried that once and it didn't work."

"People will be upset if you change it now."

Clearly these are mere excuses, attempts to prevent change.

Hopelessness

At an earlier time in our schools' history it was easy to understand how teachers could have been dominated by feelings of hopelessness. There were hardly any funds to use for innovations; no materials and no support for inservice programs. The rationale may be less obvious today; but contemporary teachers have become reluctant to become involved with new programs. Whereas, yesterday's teachers suffered from a lack of innovations, today's teachers suffer from too many! Too often teachers become enthusiastic over the opportunity to innovate only to see their invested time, energy, and talents wasted as the innovation is discontinued shortly after its development.

In this country the most effective proposals for educational change have been made by national commissions.[6] Those programs which have brought the most monumental changes to education have been initiated and partially or fully supported at the national level. Unfortunately, some of the most significant changes have been only temporary. This is true because as long as they are mandated, there are definite penalties for their abandonment. Yet, most innovations in

education are funded as "seed" programs with the agreement that the institution will use the funds to start the program, and once underway will finance it with local funds. Too often the local agencies have reneged on their part of the agreement. In fact, almost always these seed programs are abandoned as soon as the federal money is withdrawn. It is no wonder that teachers are so reluctant to invest their time, energy, and emotional enthusiasm in programs which they know will probably endure for only a few months or at most, a few years.

Overcoming the Barriers

Contemporary educators must find ways to overcome each and all of these barriers. A definite plan is needed in advance of any major program change. A good plan should always include the following topics.

Time Schedule

The timing of an innovation is crucial. Trump and Miller (1976) advise administrators (or other change agents) to capitalize on events outside the school using them as a psycholigical lever to encourage change.[7] For example, a series of newspaper articles on the "Back to Basics" movement can provide a good lever to examine the fundamentals in your curriculum, or an awareness of a coming visitation by a state or regional accrediting team can be as asset if the innovation is timed accordingly.

Once begun, the innovation must move at a moderate, steady pace.

It the movement is too fast, it will lose individuals and consequently will lose their support. Yet, if it drags on for too long, others will lose their enthusiasm and may conclude the change not worth their effort.

Total Involvement

All who may be even slightly affected by the change should be directly involved in the change. The need to involve everyone has been recognized for years. As early as 1960, the failure to involve everyone was recognized as the major cause of abandonment of innovations.[8] Yet, it isn't enough to just include the names of all in the innovation. Each person should be involved meaningfully. This means that the planner of the innovation should consider how each individual can be used so as to enable him or her to employ their expertise. Only through such useful involvement can a lasting commitment be secured from everyone.

Overcoming Habit and Fear

Realizing that any change in the program is going to jeopardize some of the comfort and security of everyone, the innovator must find ways to offset these losses. In short, he or she should introduce the idea in a way that everyone can see the possible impact of the program. As one author has put it, "Their vision must be extended."[9]

An old chinese Proverb which proclaims the best leaders as those who are not thought of as leaders is applicable to the reduction of the fear that is so commonly experienced. By identifying a particular group of people to introduce and lead the change, fellow members are

apt to perceive the idea as their own or as belonging to their colleagues. This permits the principal or curriculum director to apply their power to "support" their faculty; and by letting the faculty or community vote and decide to make the change, individuals will tend to perceive it as a project that they want to do, not have to do. On the other hand, should the principal introduce the change, there would be fears of not pleasing the administrator or resentment toward the innovation as being a tactic contrived to enhance the image of the principal. Most faculties tend to resent working just for the purpose of putting another feather in the principal's hat. The fears can be reduced still further by reminding members that the change will be a temporary one that can be discarded at any time, should the majority wish to return to the existing program.

Overcoming Hopelessness

The planner must help by giving the psychological and financial support which is always needed and by assuring members that this support will not be withdrawn once the program begins to operate smoothly. If the original planner is not the administrator, then the planner must convince the administration of the value in the program to the degree that the needed support is acquired. The administrator must be reminded that his moral support and more is needed. Success will depend on his/her financial support and full cooperation. Providing the necessary space and time for faculty members to plan and institutionalize the change is an absolute necessity. Without time for planning and sponsored inservice programs, teachers quickly

sense a lack of support, and abandon it.

The feeling of hopelessness can further be reduced by the development of a reward system to give recognition to all participants in the innovation. Public announcements at school and civic functions, as well as announcements through the mass media, can keep the support level up. An evaluation team may be needed to keep the change agent continuously informed of the progress of each working group.

By being aware of these resisting forces, the innovator can develop his or her own strategies for dealing with each. Good open communications are indispensable. So is the remembering that all program changes require changing people, a task that is always far more complicated, difficult, and time consuming than it appears.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Wilmot, "A Dialogue Between Strephon and Daphne," in The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Second Ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 407.

2. Samuel Clemons, "The Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation," Sketches New and Old, 1900, p. 350, in The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Second Ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 550.

3. Goodwin Watson, "Resistance to Change,: in Concepts for Social Change (Washington, D.C.: National Training Laboratories, NEA, 1967), p. 10.

4. Robert J. Alfonso, Gerald R. Firth, and Richard F. Neville, Instructional Supervision: A Behavior System (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975), pp. 168-76.

5. L. Geiser, "I'd Like to Change Things But...," Illinois Teacher 90 (October 1972): 20-25.

6. Encyclopedia of Educational Research. Fourth Edition, ed. Robert L. Ebel (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 277.

7. J. Lloyd Trump and Delmas F. Miller, Secondary School Curriculum Improvement: Proposals and Procedures (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968).

8. Hilda Taba, Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1960).

9. Jack R. Frymier and Horace C. Hawn, Curriculum Improvement for Better Schools (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company, 1970).